



NEWS RELEASE

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Debra Wong Yang

United States Attorney
Central District of California

Thom Mrozek, Public Affairs Officer
(213) 894-6947
thom.mrozek@usdoj.gov
www.usdoj.gov/usao/cac

SOUTH BAY MAN SENTENCED TO FEDERAL PRISON FOR SMUGGLING ALIENS AND TROPICAL FISH INTO U.S.

A San Pedro man who admitted smuggling both tropical fish and illegal aliens into the United States was sentenced this afternoon to nearly four years in federal prison.

Craig Lightner, 41, was sentenced to spend 46 months in prison by United States District Judge Gary A. Feess, who also ordered the defendant to pay a \$60,000 fine.

Lightner pleaded guilty in September to smuggling protected tropical fish and approximately 70 illegal aliens into the United States. Lightner specifically pleaded guilty to encouraging or inducing aliens to enter the United States for financial gain.

In plea agreements filed last year in United States District Court in Los Angeles, Lightner admitted that he smuggled illegal aliens into the United States on two occasions in August 2004. Using two rented boats – the 47-foot yacht *Soul Mates* and the 44-foot yacht *C'est La Vie* – Lightner was involved in the smuggling of 20 and then 50 illegal immigrants who were transported from Tijuana to Ensenada and then to the Port of Los Angeles. The alien smuggling scheme was discovered on August 30, 2004, when the *C'est La Vie* was stopped and boarded by the United States Coast Guard before approximately 50 aliens were off-loaded in the Port of Los Angeles. The interdiction of the rented French-built yacht by the U.S. Coast Guard represented the largest incident of maritime human smuggling

in the Los Angeles area in recent years. The aliens, including a three-year-old boy and a woman in her final month of pregnancy, were crowded into the vessel's small cabin, which was designed to sleep eight people.

Two men who manned the *C'est La Vie* previously pleaded guilty to federal charges and will be sentenced later this year.

In the second case in which he pleaded guilty, Lightner admitted that he smuggled very rare and expensive tropical fish into the United States. The fish – Clarion Angelfish, which are indigenous to Mexico and can cost up to \$2,000 each – were smuggled into the country in May 2004 through Los Angeles International Airport. In that case, Lightner pleaded guilty to one count of smuggling the tropical fish into the U.S. without declaring them to federal authorities. Many of the angelfish smuggled into the U.S. were given to the Aquarium of the Pacific.

This case was investigated by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the United States Coast Guard.

CONTACT: Assistant United States Attorney William W. Carter
Chief, Environmental Crimes Section
(213) 894-3547

Assistant United States Attorney Jaime Guerrero
(213) 894-2217